

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Today the Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, Refugees, Border Security, and International Law held a hearing on the treatment of Latin Americans of Japanese Descent, European Americans, and Jewish Refugees During World War II. Representative Xavier Becerra (CA-31), Vice Chair of the House Democratic Caucus and author of H.R. 42, the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Latin Americans of Japanese Descent Act, applauded the subcommittee's investigation of this important issue.

"Today's hearing marks an important step forward in the quest to provide redress for a group of innocent people who were unjustly taken from their home countries and interned in the United States during World War II," Rep. Becerra said. "It is not only important that we right this wrong—it is essential that we learn from this history, so that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past. I thank Chairwoman Lofgren and the distinguished members of the subcommittee for examining this long-overlooked issue."

If signed into law, Rep. Becerra's bill would create a commission to investigate and study the wartime actions taken by the U.S. government with regard to Japanese Latin Americans during World War II and make recommendations to Congress for any appropriate remedies based on their findings. The commission would be composed of nine members, three each appointed by the president, the speaker of the House, and the president pro tempore of the Senate.

"We are thrilled to finally testify before the House of Representatives," Grace Shimizu, Director of the Japanese Peruvian Oral History Project and Coordinator of Campaign For Justice: Redress Now for Japanese Latin Americans, said following the hearing. "We thank the Chairwoman and Ranking Member for bringing this issue to light. These investigations are needed now more than ever before. There is so much that we can learn from this hidden wartime history, to prevent future human rights violations during wartime."

Between December 1941 and February 1948, approximately 2,300 men, women, and children of Japanese ancestry were abducted from 13 Latin American countries and deported to internment camps in the United States. The U.S. government orchestrated and financed this operation with the intention of using these individuals as hostages in exchange for Americans held by Japan. Over 800 people, many who were second or third generation Latin Americans and had no familial or linguistic ties to Japan, were used in two prisoner of war exchanges. The remaining detainees were held in U.S. internment camps until after the end of the war.

The 1981 Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians report led to the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which provided an official apology and financial redress to most of the Japanese Americans who were subjected to wrongdoing and confined in U.S. internment camps during World War II. This act was the culmination of a half century of struggle to bring justice to those to whom it was denied. However, Latin Americans of Japanese ancestry have not yet experienced the closure they deserve or obtained the justice to which they are entitled.

H.R. 42 was introduced by Rep. Becerra January 6, 2009; an identical Senate version was introduced by Senator Daniel K. Inouye of Hawaii on the same day.

“I would like to thank Grace Shimizu, Libia Yamamoto, and Professor Daniel Masterson who testified in today’s first panel for lending us their extensive knowledge and poignant stories of the Japanese Latin American internment experience—it will provide valuable insight and a deeper understanding of the tragedy this community endured,” Rep. Becerra said.

- [Click here to visit Rep. Becerra's Web page for H.R. 42.](#)

BECERRA.HOUSE.GOV